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ABSTRACT

In 1992-93 a client satisfaction plan for teachers was developed and implemented in the Virginia Beach (Virginia) public school system. This report describes the processes of design and implementation as well as preliminary findings from the field test of a survey soliciting parent perceptions of teacher performance. Although students were recognized as the clients of teachers, parent were the target client group in this study. Forty-six percent of the district's teachers volunteered to participate, and 40,128 forms of a survey developed for the study were sent to parents of their students. The overall return rate was slightly over 50%. These were compiled for each participating teacher. Results were positive, with parent comments about teachers generally favorable. Parents supported the idea of client satisfaction and generally appreciated the teachers' efforts. Results were used to refine the survey for later use. Five tables present survey findings. (SLD)

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Executive Summary

A Report on the Virginia Beach Client Satisfaction Plan for Teachers

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TM 022 135

Executive Summary: A Report on the Virginia Beach Client Satisfaction Plan for Teachers

During 1992-93 a client satisfaction plan for teachers was developed and implemented in the Virginia Beach, Virginia, public school system. This report contains a description of the process involved in the design and implementation of the project as well as preliminary findings from the field test of a survey soliciting parent perceptions of teacher performance. The primary goal of the client satisfaction project is to improve the educational experiences of children in the Virginia Beach schools.

Rationale

Traditionally, most of the interactions between classroom teachers and parents occur as a result of some problem that happens at school. While many Virginia Beach teachers may occasionally make an effort to inform parents about classroom accomplishments or about specific improvement efforts, more often it is low achievement or discipline matters that generates the need to communicate, particularly in the middle schools and high schools. It is especially rare for a parent to initiate communication to praise the teacher.

The purpose of the client satisfaction project is to offset this trend. Specifically, as parents recognize that their input into the education process is desired and valued, it is expected that they will become more involved in the schooling of their child. This increased involvement is intended to lead to

a better understanding (on their part) of the complexities of teaching. Additionally, it is anticipated that as teachers gain increased awareness of the parents' willingness to constructively participate in the learning success of their child, they will become more sensitive to parents' perceptions of the classroom environment, thus further enhancing the cooperation efforts of teachers and parents.

Development

The client satisfaction project began with the determination of the ***client*** of the classroom teacher. Clearly teachers have many clients, including students, parents, principals, other teachers, and employers. Few would disagree that the student is the primary recipient in the teaching–learning process, however, in this project the Virginia Beach superintendent of schools targeted parents as the *client* for several reasons. Most importantly, they are the decision makers concerning their child's schooling. They choose the school district, they choose the school zone within the district, and they pay the bills. Furthermore, research confirms the importance of the parents' role in the child's academic success.

During July of 1992 the superintendent appointed a task force of teachers to develop the client satisfaction plan. The intent of the project was not so much for parents to evaluate teaching performance or to do performance appraisals on their child's teacher, but simply to let the teacher know their satisfaction level with overall classroom effectiveness. Much discussion among the teachers centered on the issue of *knowledge versus perception*. There was general agreement that while most parents may have very little direct knowledge about what happens in their child's classroom,

they do have opinions and they have perceptions about what goes on. A decision was made to solicit parent perceptions.

The task force first developed a list of what they considered to be the important elements of teaching. A list of 75 specific items that were cast in the format of *Strongly Agree*(SA), *Agree*(A), *Disagree*(D), *Strongly Disagree* (SD), and *No Answer* were developed. The directions instructed respondents to mark *No Answer* if for any reason they did not feel they could provide a response for an item.

Next the identified items were presented to a sample of parents who were asked to respond to each in terms of a teacher currently teaching their child. They also rated each item on their view of its *importance* in the educational experience of the child. Parents of students from all grade levels were included in the sample.

The results were returned to the teacher task force who used the parent information to alter, delete, or add items. This process resulted in a list of 56 items that were placed on two survey forms (*Parent Perception Survey*©, Form A and Form B) for field testing during the 1992-93 school year. The items dealt with the classroom environment, discipline, homework, grading, instruction, and communication. A sample of these items appears in Table 1. Both forms included write-in areas for the parents to make comments about the teacher and about the project in general.

Table 1: Sample Items on the *Parent Perception Survey©*

My child's teacher:					
1. challenges my child	SA	A	D	SD	N
2. makes me feel comfortable contacting him/her	SA	A	D	SD	N
3. recognizes positive behaviors	SA	A	D	SD	N
4. explains the homework assignment	SA	A	D	SD	N
5. creates a safe classroom environment	SA	A	D	SD	N

A second charge to the teacher task force was to formulate guidelines for use of the data generated by the *Parent Perception Survey©*. It was determined that (1) teacher participation in the client satisfaction plan would be voluntary; (2) the surveys would be scored and the results would be tabulated and analyzed by an agency outside the Virginia Beach school system; and (3) a confidential summary of the results would be returned directly to individual teachers to use as they thought best.

Data Source

During September of 1992 all teachers in the school district were invited to help test the survey items. By the end of January, 1,704 teachers indicated their willingness to participate in the field test. This number included some counselors and librarians. A decision was made to construct separate survey instruments for these two groups,[1] leaving 1,610 classroom

[1] A group of librarians and a group of counselors met independent of the teacher task force, but with the same general goal. Their charge was to identify a client and develop a means of obtaining information from that client that could help them do a better job. Both groups selected classroom teachers as the client and opted to develop a survey instrument to solicit teacher perceptions of their job performance. The counselor instrument was administered during the week of May 24, 1993, with 130 counselors (64% of the population) voluntarily participating. The library/media specialist instrument was administered during the

teachers (46% of the teaching force) to participate in the field test of the parent survey. These teachers were classified as follows:

(1) elementary grade level teachers,

(2) elementary resource teachers (including special education),

(3) middle school teachers, and

(4) senior high school teachers.

For elementary grade level teachers, the parents of all assigned students were surveyed. For elementary resource teachers (e.g., art, physical education, reading), a random sample of parents of students at a selected grade level were surveyed. For special education teachers (not self-contained), a random sample of parents of students from the teacher's roster were surveyed. In middle and senior high schools, one class period (2nd bell) was selected and only the parents of students assigned to that class were surveyed. Some modifications were made in the above guidelines to ensure that each participant had a survey population of at least 25 parents whenever possible.

A total of 40,128 survey forms were mailed directly to parents on April 20, 1993. The name of the teacher, the school name, and the grade level or subject was printed on each form. Half the schools in the district used Form A, and half used Form B, but all of the teacher volunteers within a building used the same form. Upon completion of a survey, the parent returned the form to the outside scoring agency in a pre addressed, stamped envelope that was provided. Since these forms were unsigned, anonymity was assured.

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week of June 1, 1993, with 67 library media specialists (63% of the population) voluntarily participating. A separate report summarizes the results for each of these groups.

Results

The overall return rate was slightly over 50% with higher percentages returned for elementary school teachers than for middle or senior high school teachers. Additionally, regular classroom teachers received more returns than resource teachers. Approximately 10% of the surveys were sent to incorrect respondents or were returned by the postal service, thus detailing errors in the district's student database.

A confidential summary of the responses to each question was delivered to each participating teacher on June 17, 1993. A fictitious example of the summary information is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Example of the Report Provided for Each Teacher

Teacher: Jane Doe **Summary Report**

School: Virginia Beach Elementary School

Grade/Subject: Grade 4

Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	No Answer		Missing	
#	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%
1	17	77	4	18	1	5	0	0	3.7	2	8	1	4
2	23	96	1	4	0	0	0	0	4.0	1	4	0	0
3	12	57	6	29	1	5	2	10	3.3	2	8	2	8
4	18	86	1	5	1	5	1	5	3.7	3	12	1	4
•													
•													
•													
28	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0	3.5	0	0	3	12
29	6	24	9	36	5	20	5	20	2.6	0	0	0	0
30	25	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.0	0	0	0	0
31	8	38	7	33	4	19	2	10	3.0	4	16	0	0

Number of Surveys Returned: 25

Grand Mean: **3.5**

As can be seen in Table 2, the summary report included the number and percentage of responses in each of four categories: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree,* and *Strongly Disagree*. The number and percentage of responses in the *No Answer* category were included as well. The values in the *Missing* column indicate the number and percentage of respondents leaving each item blank.

The values in the *Mean* column were determined as follows: responses under *Strongly Agree* were assigned a value of 4, those under *Agree* a value of 3, those under *Disagree* a value of 2, and those under *Strongly Disagree* a value of 1. The *Mean* is simply the average of these values, thus the *Mean* could range from a high of 4 (all responses were *Strongly Agree*) to a low of 1 (all responses are *Strongly Disagree*).

The value at the bottom of Table 3 labeled *Grand Mean* is the average of all the individual item *Means*. It is this value that indicates the overall parental perception of teacher Jane Doe.

The results were extremely positive for participating teachers. The *Grand Mean* (based on a 4.0 scale) for all participating teachers was 3.4 on both Form A and Form B. A breakdown of the data by school level appears in Table 3. The data have also been disaggregated by grade level, by subject, and by school.

Table 3: Grand Means by Category

School Level	*Form A*	*Form B*
Elementary Schools	3.4	3.5
Middle Schools	3.2	3.3
High Schools	3.2	3.3
All Schools	3.4	3.4

Spaces were included on the surveys for parents to express their opinions about the client satisfaction project or to make comments about the teacher. All parent comments were returned directly to the teacher.

Comments about the teachers were extremely positive. The comments were divided into three main categories: affirmative (e.g., this is an excellent teacher, this teacher is a true professional), constructive (e.g., class size is too big, more communication is needed), and dissenting (e.g., explanations given are inadequate, this teacher does not return my phone calls). A summary of comments about the teacher appears in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Comments About the Teacher

	Elementary Schools	*Middle Schools*	*High Schools*
Affirmative	77.5%	67.1%	64.5%
Constructive	7.0%	10.4%	12.0%
Dissenting	16.0%	22.5%	23.0%

Comments about the project were also overwhelmingly positive. These comments were also divided into three main categories: affirmative (e.g., thank you for asking my opinion, I hope you continue to do this), constructive (e.g., clarify the question about communication, these questions are hard to answer without being in the classroom), and dissenting (e.g., this was a waste of time and money, parents will not be objective and shouldn't be asked). A summary of comments about the client satisfaction project appears in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Comments About the Client Satisfaction Project

	Elementary Schools	*Middle Schools*	*High Schools*
Affirmative	48.5%	50.5%	41.8%
Constructive	47.0%	43.0%	51.0%
Dissenting	4.0%	6.5%	7.2%

Conclusions

On the basis of the numerical results and the written comments from the field test data the conclusions below seem appropriate.

(1) The parents in Virginia Beach fully support the idea of client satisfaction for public schools.

(2) In general, parents appreciate and value the efforts Virginia Beach teachers put forth on behalf of their child.

However, both of these conclusions need to be viewed in light of the fact that not all teachers volunteered to participate in the field test of the survey questions and consequently, not all parents had the opportunity to express their opinions or to share their perceptions. Still, these results would seem to refute the belief held by some that a sizable group of parents exists that, given the opportunity, will denounce teachers.

During July participating teachers were invited to a meeting to discuss survey results. At that meeting they were offered suggestions for interpreting their own summary report and they were given an opportunity to share feelings about the experience of participating in this project. One point that emerged from this session is that some teachers worry excessively

about even a single negative comment, even when the majority of comments about them are very positive. It may be that teachers need to be provided with assistance in constructively responding to negative feedback.

Refining

The data from the field test of the items on the two surveys were used to construct a final version of the instrument. Three sources of information were utilized in this process.

The teacher task force considered the percentage of parents that marked *No Answer* and the percentage that left an item blank. Those items that appeared difficult for parents to answer were either deleted or altered.

Also, Coefficient Alphas (an index of reliability) were computed for each item. Items that added little to the overall reliability of the survey were either deleted or altered.

Additionally, a randomly selected group of parents (n=50) participated in a test-retest reliability study. These parents completed a survey form about their child's teacher. These were collected and the same parents were asked to fill out an identical form seven days later. The results from the administration of the two surveys were correlated item by item. Items with low correlations were also either deleted or altered.

These steps produced a list of 27 items to be included on a final version of the *Parent Perception Survey*© for use in 1993-94. These items should produce a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the perceptions of parents. The instrument and the implementation plan is to be reviewed annually.